**Brown Brother – by Joshua Iosefo**

I am brown.

Brown like the bark of the palm tree that supports my heritage. Brown like the table of which my family sits and eats upon. Brown like the paper bag containing burgers and fries by which my people consume. Brown like the mud on a rugby field by which my people play. Brown like the coat of the guitar by which my people strum. Brown like the sugar or the crust, the grain or the nut, whatever ingredient you want to use to mix up and around; you see my brother, I am Brown.

My demographic is: high school cleaning ladies, fast food burger-making, factory box-packing, rubbish truck drivers, bus drivers, taxi drivers, sober drivers and living off the pension joy riders—I am a dropout. I hate science, math, English. Love P.E, music, dance and drama—I play rugby. No, I am good at rugby. And if I am lucky my future in rugby might be sealed, not to reveal my flaws in education which are faulty because hey, who needs to be able to quote Shakespeare if you can play rugby?

I will probably never graduate and if I do then I will be the first. Either by myself or with a baby in or beside me, victim of teen pregnancy with a guy in high school I thought was ‘skux’. Which really sucks. You see ‘cause when push came to shove he couldn’t pay the bucks. While I was focusing on this relationship I was trying to get through NCEA one, two and three purely on luck. Now I am stuck in a muck trying to scrub my skin with ‘lux’, soap. Trying to scrub away the fact that I have added to the brown statistic. While my mother is a gambler and my father is an alcoholic.

I will always blame the government and everybody else around me but never myself—because I am brown. And whenever someone tries to breach my comfort zone or whenever I don’t have anything else to say in defense in an argument, I’m going to say that “you’re a racist”. That your words are a mockery to my skin tone and my colour. Oh but brown brother you were doing that the day you performed *Sinarella, Brotown, Sione’s Wedding* and do I have to mention *The G.C.*

Now I don’t mean to condescend, those shows are great, don’t get me wrong. But can anyone explain? Will there ever be a time when our representation goes deeper than putting our own people to shame? Will the stereotype of an illiterate, misbehaved, unintelligent Polynesian still be the same? Will it ever change? Or are we still going to sell ourselves short for a few seconds of fame? Are we not capable of an art form that is thought-provoking or seen as a form of intelligence? Or are we still going to keep to our low standards of what we feel as ‘culturally relevant’.

Not teasing or mocking our foreign traditions, but instead of being real about the world we live in. Like being real about our fight against gambling, or our fight against violence and our fight against what ‘reasonable force’ is, with our kids. Or how statistically Maori and Pacific Islanders are low academic achievers—brown brother. Now I’m not saying that we need to forget our culture in order to gain—for we are all the same. I’m just sick and tired of my people always thinking they belong at the bottom of the food chain—brown brother.

Are we not more than an F.O.B? Immigrants from the islands in search of a J.O.B? Are we not more than the eye; [I] can see? Can we not move mountains from point A to point B? Are we not more than assets to the first fifteen? Are we not more than gamblers at a pokie machine? Are we not more than fathers at the T.A.B? Are we not capable of attaining a Bachelor’s, a Master’s or a P.H.D? Brown brother, look at me.

“You can do all things through Christ, Philippians 4:13. You are more than capable. And I don’t say that to make you feel better, I say that because I know. Cause your creator told me to tell you so. You will go places, you will tell stories, so do not feel afraid or alone for your God and your family and your home will forever be inside the marrow of your bones. So do not fret, do not regret. For where you go, you take us with you. Brown brother, do not be afraid to be the first, the first to graduate, the first to climb, the first prime minister, or the first good wife—brown brother, do not be afraid to be the change. Not in skin tone or colour, but a change in mindset. From one brown brother, to another.